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ABSTRACT

This document is designed as a guide for those institutions considering application for membership in the Middle States Association, those accepted as candidate institutions, and those accredited institutions engaged in self-review and peer evaluation. In their self-review processes, institutions demonstrate how they meet these accreditation standards within the context of their own institutional mission and goals. Accredited institutions are expected to demonstrate the standards outlined in this document in substantial measure, to conduct their activities in a manner consistent with the standards, and to engage in ongoing processes of self-review and improvement. The individual standard is expressed in one or two sentences, and fundamental elements are presented as an explication of each standard. The final section of each standard describes optional analysis and evidence that each institution could present relative to a particular standard. The first seven standards relate to institutional context, and the second seven standards describe educational effectiveness. The 14 accreditation standards are: (1) "Mission, Goals, and Objectives"; (2) "Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal"; (3) "Institutional Resources"; (4) "Leadership and Governance"; (5) "Administration"; (6) "Integrity"; (7) "Institutional Assessment"; (8) "Student Admissions"; (9) "Student Support Services"; (10) "Faculty"; (11) "Educational Offerings"; (12) "General Education"; (13) "Related Educational Activities"; and (14) "Assessment of Student Learning." (SLD)

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Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education

Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Introduction

An institution of higher education is a community dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, to the study and clarification of values, and to the advancement of the society it serves. To support these goals, institutions of higher education within the Middle States region joined together in 1919 to form the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, a professional association devoted to educational improvement through accreditation. Today's successor organization for higher education accreditation is the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Accreditation is the means of self-regulation and peer review adopted by the educational community. The accrediting process is intended to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity of higher education, making it worthy of public confidence and minimizing the scope of external control. The extent to which each educational institution accepts and fulfills the responsibilities inherent in the process is a measure of its concern for freedom and quality in higher education and its commitment to striving for and achieving excellence in its endeavors.

Middle States' accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. Based upon the results of institutional review by peers and colleagues assigned by the Commission, accreditation attests to the judgment of the Commission on Higher Education that an institution has met the following criteria:

- ❑ that it has a mission appropriate to higher education;
- ❑ that it is guided by well-defined and appropriate goals, including goals for student learning;
- ❑ that it has established conditions and procedures under which its mission and goals can be realized;
- ❑ that it assesses both institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes, and uses the results for improvement;
- ❑ that it is accomplishing its mission and goals substantially;
- ❑ that it is so organized, staffed, and supported that it can be expected to continue to accomplish its mission and goals; and
- ❑ that it meets the eligibility requirements and standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Membership in the Middle States Association follows a period of candidacy lasting up to five years. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education reviews institutions periodically through either on-site evaluation or other reports. Accreditation is continued only as a result of periodic reviews and evaluations through assessments of institutional achievements.

Characteristics of Excellence is designed as a guide for those institutions considering application for membership, those accepted as candidate institutions, and those accredited institutions engaged in self-review and peer evaluation. In their self-review processes, institutions demonstrate how they meet these accreditation standardswithin the context of their own institutional mission and goals. No assurance is given or implied that every accredited institution manifests these characteristics and meets these standards in equal proportion. Accredited institutions are expected to demonstrate these standards in substantial measure, to conduct their activities in a manner consistent with the standards, and to engage in ongoing processes of self-review and improvement.

Characteristics of Excellence 2002

Higher education is changing, and many institutions are in a state of important transition. It is both exciting and unsettling that new educational models and means of delivering educational programs and services are evolving at all levels of higher education. Complex challenges include federal and state regulation, performance-based funding, issues of intellectual property, and increased calls for definition and review of student learning and for other types of public accountability.

Mindful of these realities, the Commission and the constituent Steering Committee charged with overseeing the development of these revised accreditation standards formulated several principles as a guide and foundation for the standards review process. Consistent with those principles, this edition of *Characteristics of Excellence,* endorsed and approved by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in January 2002, differs from prior editions in both emphasis and format.

Among the principles that guided the development of these revised standards, three are particularly noteworthy. First, these standards place greater emphasis on institutional assessment and assessment of student learning. Second, the standards acknowledge the diversity of educational delivery systems that enable institutions to meet accreditation standards. And third, in order to achieve greater specificity, the standards are more clearly defined and illustrated, including examples of evidence that could substantiate an institution's achievement of the standards.

The emphasis on institutional assessment and assessment of student learning follows naturally from the Commission's existing standards and decades of attention to outcomes assessment through publications, workshops, and training sessions. Nonetheless, the Commission is aware of the institutional effort and cultural change that the increased relative emphasis on assessment may require.

The Commission on Higher Education acknowledges that in order to meet these revised standards, institutions will be called upon to commit resources to the tasks of research and analysis, particularly as related to the assessment and improvement of teaching and learning. The Commission hopes, too, that existing self-study resources can be redirected by reducing the emphasis on the detailed study of institutional resources and other input measures of institutional performance. Concurrently, there is an understanding that in this changing environment, there is much that warrants further research and study. We have more to learn about assessing learning and measuring effectiveness, whether within traditional educational structures or the newer technologically mediated environments.

These standards also affirm that the individual mission and goals of each institution remain the context within which these accreditation standards are applied during self-study and evaluation. The standards emphasize functions rather than specific structures, recognizing that there are many different models for educational excellence.

The particular way in which a standard is evidenced may vary, consistent with differences in institutional mission and purpose. In addition, some standards (particularly 12: General Education and 13: Related Educational Activities) may not apply fully or at all to some institutions. The standard on General Education, for example, might not be especially relevant for an institution that only offers graduate degree programs. Similarly, the "Related Educational Activities" contained in Standard 13 are to be addressed only as they relate to individual institutions.

Although *Characteristics of Excellence* incorporates fourteen individual standards, these standards should be viewed as an interrelated whole. The order is not intended to suggest relative importance or priority. The first seven standards address Institutional Context, and the second seven focus on Educational Effectiveness. Consistent with the intended emphasis on assessment, each of these two sections concludes with a related assessment standard (Standard 7: Institutional Assessment and Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

Format and Application

To achieve clarity of presentation, the following format has been used for the fourteen standards for accreditation:

Standard

The individual standard is expressed in one or two sentences. The standard is followed by *narrative text*, under the heading "Context," that addresses the topic of the standard, its context and values; provides guidance and definition; and builds a bridge to the Fundamental Elements. The narrative is not considered to be part of the actual standard.

Fundamental Elements

The Fundamental Elements are an explication of the standard, and, as such, they specify the particular characteristics or qualities that together constitute, comprise, and encompass the standard. Institutions and evaluators will use these elements, within the context of institutional mission, to demonstrate or determine compliance with the standard. Institutions will utilize the Fundamental Elements, along with the Standards, as a guide to their self-study processes.

The Fundamental Elements specified for each standard have an inherent relationship to each other, and collectively these elements constitute compliance. In light of this, neither the institution nor evaluators should use the Fundamental Elements as a simple checklist. Both the institution and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by these elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Where an institution does not evidence a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

Much of the evidence or analysis that an institution will present to demonstrate that it meets the accreditation standards is clear and inherent within the Fundamental Elements themselves. Optional Analysis and Evidence, the final section of each standard, provides additional examples of documentation and analyses that might be carried out by an institution, relative to the particular accreditation standard. The information is provided for use, as deemed appropriate, by the institution; it is not intended for independent utilization by the evaluation team. The list is not comprehensive, and institutions are not required to provide the information listed.

Each institution will determine whether its self-study processes and reports may be strengthened by incorporating some of these analyses and resources. Furthermore, institutions electing to include evidence from this optional list are not required to present all possible information; rather, institutions should make reasonable choices regarding representative, useful sampling of evidence in any suggested category. Relevant to each standard and its fundamental elements, institutions are encouraged to incorporate other types of assessment and analysis particular to their mission, goals, programs, and structures, including assessment documents prepared for other accrediting or regulatory agencies.

Standards at a Glance

Institutional Context

Standard 1: Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and explains whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals and objectives, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission, goals, and objectives are developed and recognized by the institution with its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and uses the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support to academic and intellectual freedom.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in: achieving its mission and goals; implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes; using institutional resources efficiently; providing leadership and governance; providing administrative structures and services; demonstrating institutional integrity; and assuring that institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its students and graduates.

Educational Effectiveness

Standard 8: Student Admissions

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

Institutional programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for Candidacy status, Initial Accreditation or Reaffirmation of Accreditation, an institution must demonstrate that it meets or continues to meet the following eligibility requirements of the Commission on Higher Education. (All terminology is used as defined within the accreditation standards.)

1. The institution is authorized to operate as an educational institution and award postsecondary degrees by an appropriate governmental organization within the Middle States region and other agencies as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates. Based on review of individual institutional requests, the Commission may determine that degree-granting authority from a U.S. or foreign governmental or other agency outside the Middle States region is an acceptable alternative.

2. The institution's mission is clearly defined and adopted by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization, and is appropriate to a degree granting institution of higher education.

3. Educational programs within the institution award credit towards postsecondary degrees equivalent to at least one academic year in length.

4. The governing body is able to assure that the institution adheres to the eligibility requirements, describes itself in identical terms to all accrediting agencies, can be reasonably expected to adhere to accreditation standards and policies, communicate any changes in its accredited status, and that it will make freely available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations.

5. The institution publishes in its catalog or other appropriate places accurate and current information that describes purposes and objectives, admission requirements and procedures, academic calendars, rules and regulations directly affecting students, programs and courses, degrees offered and the degree requirements, costs and refund policies, grievance procedures, academic credentials of faculty and administrators, and other items relative to attending the institution and withdrawing from it.

6. The institution devotes a sufficient portion of its income to the support of its educational purposes and programs.

7. The institution complies with applicable interregional policies, such as "Separately Accreditable Institutions" and "Evaluation of Institutions Operating Interregionally."

Institutions Seeking Candidacy or Initial Accreditation

Institutions seeking Candidacy status or Initial Accreditation must also meet the following requirements, as well as requirements detailed in *Candidacy for Accreditation*. Since these requirements also are included more specifically within the standards for accreditation, accredited institutions are not required to demonstrate separately that they meet these eligibility requirements.

8. *For those seeking candidacy*: The institution is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs. *For those seeking initial accreditation*: The institution has graduated students or can demonstrate that the lack of such graduates does not compromise its ability to demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes.

9. The institution provides evidence of basic planning that integrates plans for academic, personnel, information, learning resources, and financial development.

10. The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support its mission and educational programs and to assure financial stability. The institution regularly undergoes and makes available an external audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public audit agency.

11. The institution maintains physical facilities for administration, faculty, students, and programs and services that are appropriate for the institution's mission and educational programs offered.

12. The institution has a functioning governing body responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all governing body responsibilities. The governing body is an independent policy-making body, capable of reflecting constituent and public interest within governance activities and decisions, pursuant to the *Characteristics of Excellence*. There is operational a conflict of interest policy for the governing body (and fiduciary body members, if such a body exists), which addresses matters such as remuneration, contractual relationships, employment, family, financial or other interests that could pose conflicts of interest, and that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution.

13. The institution has a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board, whose primary responsibility is to the institution, and who does not serve as the chair of the institution's governing body.

14. The institution has qualified administration and staff and provides the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

15. The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.

16. The institution provides student services and development programs consistent with student characteristics and its institutional mission.

17. The institution provides sufficient learning and information resources and services to support the nature, scope, and level of the programs offered.

18. The institution's faculty is sufficient in number, background and experience to support the programs offered and includes a core of faculty with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's programs. The institution provides a clear statement of faculty responsibilities including development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning.

19. The degree programs are congruent with the institution's mission; they have clearly defined and published objectives; they are based on recognized field(s) of study; they are of sufficient content and length; they are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered.

20. The institution's academic programs include a substantial general education component, either as a prerequisite or as clearly defined elements, designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry.

21. The institution engages in systematic evaluation of student achievement.

22. The institution engages in evaluating systematically how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning and documentation of institutional effectiveness.

Standards for Accreditation

Institutional Context

Standard1

Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and explains whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's statgdals and objectives, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. Ihission, goals, and objectives are developed and recognized by the institution with its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Context

The mission, developed by broad representation from all sectors of the institution and formally ratified by its primary governing body, defines the institution, delineates the scope of the institution, explains the institution's character and individuality, and articulates values as appropriate. The basic aims of higher education, and any additional aims and emphases that reflect the institution's particular character and individuality, such as research or community service, should be addressed within the statement of mission. The mission may be accompanied by related statements, such as a statement of institutional philosophy or institutional vision.

In addition to the mission, an effective institution has clearly articulated operational and educational goals that define the actions planned to meet the needs and expectations of the institution's mission and the institutional community. Goals are derived from the mission; they are based upon the appropriate aspirations of the institution in service to its students, faculty, staff and community. Goals also may incorporate elements of best practice in higher education to ensure quality, relevance and accomplishment. The statement of the institution's goals can be used to identify and communicate on-going and emerging issues specific to the institution, as well as to support relevant institutional development and self-evaluation.

Institutional objectives are outcomes-based and capable of being evaluated, and institutional assessment provides a mechanism for on-going review and refinement of goals. Educational goals and objectives particularly should be stated in terms of the outcomes they seek to achieve (e.g., the academic and personal changes and/or competencies the institution seeks to foster in its students).

The goals and objectives should be sufficiently flexible for the institution to be able to respond to opportunities and changes, including emerging academic disciplines, changes within disciplines, and the use of new instructional methods and technologies.

While an institution is expected to aspire to excellence, it is also expected to operate within realistic goals reflective of its mission and its financial, human, and physical resources. Moreover, mission, goals, and objectives are most effective when they are part of an institution-wide effort to improve and integrate the activities and operations of all elements and aspects of the institution. As an institution continually evaluates itself and improves, the institution should continue to review its mission to consider its implications and to keep it current.

Fundamental Elements of Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ clearly defined mission, goals, and objectives that:
  - guide faculty, administration, staff and governing bodies in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation , program and curriculum development, and definition of program outcomes;
  - include support of scholarly and creative activity, at levels and of the kinds appropriate to the institution's purposes and character;
  - are developed through collaborative participation by those who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional improvement and developments;
  - are formally approved, publicized and widely known by the institution's members;

- ❑ mission, goals and objectives that relate to external as well as internal contexts and constituencies;
- ❑ institutional goals and objectives that are consistent with mission; and
- ❑ goals and objectives that focus on student learning, other outcomes, and institutional improvement.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ analysis of how institutional goals are applied at different levels within the institution and how the implementation of goals is coordinated
- ❑ analysis of the processes used to develop goals and objectives and for the periodic review of mission, goals and objectives
- ❑ review of policies and processes used to disseminate mission and goals to new faculty, staff, students and members of the governing body and efforts intended to maintain awareness and commitment among continuing members of these groups
- ❑ evidence of curriculum review used to change and improve educational programs, consistent with institutional values, purpose, and goals

Standard 2

Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Context

The willingness to seek improved approaches, determine the efficacy of something previously untried, test hypotheses, and resist complacency is a sign of institutional vigor. An accredited institution uses the results of planning and assessment to maintain, support, and improve its programs and services.

An effective institution is one in which growth, development, and change are the result of a thoughtful and rational process of self-examination and planning, and where such a process is an inherent part of ongoing activities. The nature and quality of planning are among the basic indicators of institutional strength. At its best, institutional planning stimulates imaginative and creative proposals and approaches for strengthening the institution.

All institutions face the continuous challenge of finding a balance among strategic goals, the expectations of governments and other organizations to whom they are accountable, and various financial resources. At the same time that an institution strives to meet its stated purposes, the institution must remain flexible enough to respond to the dynamic environment in which it exists. Adequate planning processes, coupled with strategic thinking and clear vision and mission statements, allow an institution to continue to meet its purposes while supporting the opportunity for change and renewal.

Institutional planning is a disciplined and coordinated effort to meet the institution's objectives through decisions and actions that shape and guide what the institution is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Therefore, mission, goals and objectives provide the starting point for any institutional planning activity. As a coordinated effort, the planning process should involve representatives of all affected parts of the institution in order to promote consideration of all institutional objectives, coordination of resources,

prioritization of objectives based on resources available, and resolution of resource conflicts or the lack of resources.

Though related, planning and strategy are not the same. Planning focuses on the institution's mission and purpose – what the institution exists to do, whom it serves, and how it will continue to operate. Effective planning is supported by a systematic means to collect, verify, store, retrieve, and analyze information annually and over time.

Strategy is based on institutional vision. It assumes that the institution will be responsive to a dynamic environment. It is that part of planning which recognizes that, given the resources available, the institution's leaders must make difficult decisions about what is most important to achieve.

The entire planning process, including implementation and assessment, helps an institution to manage efficiently, maintain fiscal control, improve services and processes, and allocate resources effectively (i.e., assign the right resource to a particular project, ensure full utilization of the resource, and prioritize projects to eliminate conflicts on the use of resources).

Among other factors, institutions in their strategic planning processes may wish to consider the present status, trends, and projections with regard to enrollment, resources and funding, employer expectations, inflationary pressures, and competition for faculty and students.

An effective planning process also includes a monitoring mechanism (outcomes assessment) to determine whether or not the purposes are achieved and objectives met. Outcomes assessment also provides feedback on why the purpose and objectives were or were not met and considers how resources are being used, where resources are insufficient or underutilized, and where the quality and quantity of resources is appropriate.

The result of an effective planning process is institutional renewal. The appropriate modification of courses, programs, and services results from the thorough review of relevant quantitative and qualitative data drawn from all segments of the institutional community and is reflective of the changing needs of that community.

Change in one area of an institution can affect other areas, but institutional renewal involves the entire community and cannot be addressed in isolation. The Commission does not, however, advocate change simply for the sake of change.

Fundamental Elements of Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ clearly stated goals and objectives, both institution-wide and for individual operational units, used for planning and resource allocation at the institutional and unit levels;
- ❑ planning and improvement processes that are clearly communicated, provide for constituent participation, and incorporate the use of assessment results;
- ❑ objectives for improvement that are clearly stated, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are linked to mission and goal achievement, both institution-wide and for individual units;
- ❑ well defined decision-making processes and authority that facilitates planning and renewal;
- ❑ the assignment of responsibility for improvements and assurance of accountability;
- ❑ a record of institutional and unit improvement efforts; and
- ❑ periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence that the process for change and its anticipated impact are made explicit
- ❑ evidence of environmental scans and other processes in place for evaluating economic, political, and social climate in which the institution operates and expects to operate
- ❑ review of external affiliations and partnerships and of their impact on the climate in which the institution operates
- ❑ evidence of changes resulting from continuous improvement efforts
- ❑ evidence of renewal strategies, rationales for changes made, and anticipated impact
- ❑ assessment of resources utilized for institutional improvement
- ❑ analysis of best practice models and benchmarks applied to improvement efforts
- ❑ analysis of training and professional development activities
- ❑ evidence of quality improvement activities

Standard 3

Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Context

The effective use of institutional resources, internal and external, is crucial to institutional performance. While for some institutions, a significant portion of available resources is generated and monitored at the system level, institutional management of resource acquisition and utilization significantly contributes to the effectiveness of planning, goals achievement, mission success, and institutional integrity. Institutional support resources including financial, facilities, equipment and supplies, technology, research and instructional support and staffing, and other assets should be an integral and proportional part of all institutional planning, allocation, and assessment activities.

The allocation of resources among programs, units, and individuals is an indicator of institutional priorities. Thus, the decision-making process for allocating assets should be an integral part of the institutional plan; and the plan itself should provide a method for thoroughly reviewing, analyzing and monitoring all institutional support. Measures of efficiency and effectiveness, supported by quantitative and/or qualitative analyses related to mission and goals, may prove useful in the planning process. They may be among the significant types of information to be reported, at the system or institutional level as appropriate, in initial and continuing self-assessment and peer review for accreditation.

Fundamental Elements of Institutional Resources

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ strategies to measure and assess the level of, and efficient utilization of, institutional resources required to support the institution's mission and goals;
- ❑ rational and consistent policies and procedures in place to determine allocation of assets;
- ❑ an allocation approach that ensures adequate faculty, staff, and administration to support the institution's mission and outcomes expectations;
- ❑ a budget process aligned with the institution's mission, goals, and strategic plan that provides for an annual budget and multi-year budget projections for at least three-years, both institution-wide and among departments; utilizes planning and assessment documents; and addresses resource acquisition and allocation for the institution and any subsidiary, affiliated, or contracted educational organizations as well as for institutional systems as appropriate;
- ❑ a comprehensive facilities or infrastructure master plan and facilities/infrastructure life-cycle management plan, as appropriate to mission, and evidence of implementation;
- ❑ recognition in the comprehensive plan that facilities, such as learning resources fundamental to all educational and research programs and libraries, are adequately supported and staffed to accomplish the institution's objectives for student learning, both on campuses and at a distance;
- ❑ an educational and other equipment acquisition and replacement process and plan, including provision for current and future technology, as appropriate to the educational programs and support services, and evidence of implementation;
- ❑ adequate institutional controls to deal with financial, administrative and auxiliary operations, and rational and consistent policies and procedures in place to determine allocation of assets;
- ❑ an annual independent audit (institutional or system-wide), confirming financial responsibility, with evidence of follow-up on any concerns cited in the audit's accompanying management letter; and
- ❑ periodic assessment of the effective and efficient use of institutional resources.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of cooperative agreements for inter-institutional collaboration and resource sharing; analyses of any resulting efficiencies and impact on student achievement of academic goals
- ❑ analysis of environmental scan data and other information the institution has gathered regarding its external environment, and the implications for developing linkages with other institutions, businesses, and other organizations rather than duplicating programs or services
- ❑ evidence demonstrating the systemic approach that the institution utilizes to improve efficiency, contain costs, re-direct resources, and develop new revenue streams to support the institution's mission and goals
- ❑ review of institutional fund raising and grant activities
- ❑ review of plan and policies for endowment management to ensure consistency with the institution's financial resources, goals, and objectives and summaries of endowment performance
- ❑ review of financial statements for affiliated organizations
- ❑ review of comprehensive institution resource acquisition, planning, assessment, and budget reports
- ❑ assessment of the work of institutional committees, including the governing body's, responsible for planning, assessment, and budget activities
- ❑ review of resource allocation procedures and their relationship to planning, mission, goals, and objectives
- ❑ evidence of new or adapted strategies to enhance institutional support

Standard 4

Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Context

The primary goal of governance is to enable an educational entity to realize fully its stated mission and goals and to achieve these in the most effective and efficient manner that benefits the institution and its students. Institutional governance provides the means through which authority and responsibility are assigned, delegated, and shared in a climate of mutual support.

The Commission on Higher Education expects a climate of shared collegial governance in which all constituencies (such as faculty, administration, staff, students and governing board members, as determined by each institution) involved in carrying out the institution's mission and goals participate in the governance function in a manner appropriate to that institution. Institutions should seek to create a governance environment in which issues concerning mission, vision, program planning, resource allocation and others, as appropriate, can be discussed openly by those who are responsible for each activity. Within any system of shared governance, each major constituency must carry out its separate but complementary roles and responsibilities. Each must contribute to an appropriate degree so that decision-makers and goal-setters consider information from all relevant constituencies. While reflecting institutional mission, perspective, and culture, collegial governance structures should acknowledge also the need for timely decision-making.

The governance structure should provide for a governing body with sufficient independence and expertise to assure the academic integrity of the institution and for a chief executive officer, appointed by the governing body, whose primary responsibility is to lead the institution toward the achievement of its goals. Governing body members, regardless of how appointed, have primary responsibility to the institution and should not allow political or other influence to interfere with governing body duties. Consistent with institutional mission and sponsorship, members should represent different points of view, interests, and experiences as well as diversity in characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity,

and gender. Governing body composition should attempt to reflect student body profiles.

In some institutions such as corporate universities or subsidiaries of larger institutions, the term governing body may include a separate governing board and a fiduciary board. Whatever the title—board, directors, trustees, governors, or regents—the governing body is ultimately accountable for the academic quality, integrity, planning, assets, and financial health of the institution. It should review institutional assessment results and participate in institutional planning. However, it should not manage, micromanage, or interfere in the day-to-day operation of the institution. Always the advocate, and when necessary, the defender of the institution, the governing body is responsible for the institution's integrity and quality.

It is often the role of the governing body to oversee at the policy level the quality of teaching and learning, to approve degree programs and the awarding of degrees, to establish personnel policies and procedures (including salary schedules), to conduct or to direct the conduct of collective bargaining agreements where appropriate, to encourage research, and to approve policies and by-laws. If so provided in its structure, the governing body also may confirm appointments of leading academic and administrative officers.

In financial affairs, the members of the governing body should confine themselves, as they do in academic matters, to a basic policy-making role, ensuring strong financial management by holding the chief executive officer responsible and accountable for internal operation. The governing body, through the chief executive officer, receives periodic reports of institutional committees and campus constituencies and, when not a system matter, receives reports from auditors. The chief executive officer and the governing body should seek opportunities to stabilize and control costs, as well as opportunities to advocate actively for external support. The members of the governing body also should assist in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution through personal support and participation in fund raising for the institution, as appropriate.

Members of the governing body act with authority only as a collective entity. Governing body members of higher education institutions normally have no financial interest in the institution. In cases where financial interests may exist, such as remuneration of board members or contractual relationships, the members of the governing body should be able to demonstrate that those interests do not outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution. Although higher education institutions rarely provide remuneration for governing body service, reasonable compensation may be appropriate, for example, when responsibilities are particularly time-consuming, when legal requirements make service unusually demanding, or when compensation is needed to ensure a level of governing body expertise. Such compensation should be based on the functions required and performed and on the skill and experience of members of the governing body.

While the general description of the role of a governing body applies best to a free-standing institution, many institutions have different governance structures that depart in specific ways from this model. Examples of such institutions include individual units within a system, public institutions whose governing bodies' decisions are subject to review by a higher-level board or administrative agency, religious institutions whose governing bodies are obliged to follow direction provided by a sponsoring religious organization, some proprietary institutions, and educational units of organizations whose primary business is not education and whose leaders are responsible to corporate boards. In all of these circumstances, the roles and powers of the governing body and of any higher authorities should be explicitly stated in the institution's charter, articles of incorporation, enabling statute, by-laws, or other governance documents.

In a multiple-unit system, the governing body should clearly establish relationships and carefully balance the interests of the units with those of the total system. This may be done through a variety of structures including local representation on the system board or through local advisory councils that address unit issues. The governing body of a proprietary institution is the legally constituted body that serves the public interest by seeing that the institution clearly states and fulfills its announced mission and goals and by ensuring its continuity. A corporation with a primary business that is not academic should ensure that either its governing body or a specially formed governing body with the primary responsibility to oversee its academic enterprise, is responsible for governance consistent with this standard.

A manifestation of a governing body's responsibility is its willingness to assess its own effectiveness periodically. Additionally, the governing body should orient new group members to the mission, organization, and academic environment of the institution to assure that all members understand their role in the governance structure.

One of the major responsibilities of the governing body is to select, determine compensation for, and evaluate the chief executive officer and, in some cases, other major members of the executive management structure charged with the operations of the institution. The governing body also has responsibility to plan appropriately for transitions in institutional leadership. There are multiple models of selecting a chief executive officer, some of which may allow for the participation of faculty or other major constituencies. It is the governing body's responsibility to ensure that the selection process is established, published, and followed.

Once this selection has taken place and the individual(s) has been installed, the governing body is expected to support the executive officer in the conduct of the duties necessary to fulfill the mission of the institution through the executive officer's oversight of faculty, administration, and staff. In a similar fashion, the governing body should assist the executive officers by helping them resist pressures from individuals or groups outside the established governance structure of the institution that threaten to impede the fulfillment of institutional mission and goals.

Fundamental Elements of Leadership and Governance

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ a well-defined system of collegial governance including written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty and readily available to the campus community;
- ❑ written governing documents, such as a constitution, by-laws, enabling legislation, charter or other similar documents, that:
  - delineate the governance structure and provide for collegial governance, the structure's composition, duties and responsibilities. In proprietary, corporate and similar types of institutions, a separate document may establish the duties and responsibilities of the governing body as well as the selection process;
  - assign authority and accountability for policy development and decision making, including a process for the involvement of appropriate institutional constituencies in policy development and decision making;
  - provide for the selection process for governing body members;
- ❑ appropriate opportunity for student input regarding decisions that affect them;
- ❑ a governing body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest and of an appropriate size to fulfill all its responsibilities, and which includes members with sufficient expertise to assure that the body's fiduciary responsibilities can be fulfilled;
- ❑ a governing body not chaired by the chief executive officer ;
- ❑ a governing body that certifies to the Commission that the institution is in compliance with the eligibility requirements, accreditation standards and policies of the Commission; describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies; communicates any changes in its accredited status; and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities, including levels of governing body compensation, if any;
- ❑ a conflict of interest policy for the governing body (and fiduciary body members, if such a body exists), which addresses matters such as remuneration, contractual relationships, employment, family, financial or other interests that could pose conflicts of interest, and that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution;
- ❑ a governing body that assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution;

- ❑ a process for orienting new members and providing continuing updates for current members of the governing body on the institution's mission, organization, and academic programs and objectives;
- ❑ a procedure in place for the periodic objective assessment of the governing body in meeting stated governing body objectives;
- ❑ a chief executive officer, appointed by the governing board, with primary responsibility to the institution; and
- ❑ periodic assessment of the effectiveness of institutional leadership and governance.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ review of written policies, and evidence of implementation, that describe the processes for involvement of the governing body, administration, and faculty in policy development and decision making, specifically with respect to selection and evaluation of the chief executive officer or those in charge of operational/executive responsibilities; budgeting and resource development; oversight of the academic program; consultation regarding faculty hiring, dismissal, promotion and tenure; and monitoring operations of the institution
- ❑ review of written policies regarding situations defined by the institution as conflicts of interest, such as the presence of paid staff on the governing body
- ❑ review of handbooks for members of the governing body, administrators, faculty members and other employees to ensure that they provide adequate information regarding job descriptions and role and responsibilities in governance
- ❑ evidence and plans for governing body orientation and self-assessment
- ❑ assessment of written records of external specialists invited to the institution for consultation on planning and self-assessment issues
- ❑ review of written records to assess the carrying out of responsibilities by the governing body and its committees consistent with the institutional mission and its definition of appropriate participation by internal institutional bodies, evidence of faculty council/senate or similar body deliberation and recommendations on matters such as the development of curriculum, standards for admission and graduation, and personnel actions such as hiring, promotion, dismissal and tenure of faculty

- ❑ evidence that there is student representation appropriate to the governance structure selected by the institution for student participation
- ❑ evidence that meetings of internal bodies, such as the faculty senate, are conducted to update them on mission, resources management, and academic issues
- ❑ if applicable, review of union contracts indicating negotiated role of faculty in curriculum, hiring of faculty, promotion, and tenure

Standard 5

Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Context

An institution, regardless of its organization and the competence of its individual members, cannot function successfully unless it is properly administered and staffed. The administration should be organized with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and should have a thorough understanding of institutional mission, goals and objectives.

The administrative structure typically includes a chief executive officer and other administrators such as a chief academic officer and a chief financial officer. As an administrative structure they collectively participate in guiding the institution to achieve its goals. As individuals, each provides oversight for the various administrative services of the institution, which may include academic programs, finance and operations, student services, research and planning, instructional technology, public relations and others. In some institutions, the chief executive officer and other members of the executive structure also may have responsibility for fundraising activities.

The chief executive officer reports to the governing body and is responsible for providing institutional vision and leadership. An educational institution's chief executive should have appropriate professional characteristics suitable to the mission of the organization. The CEO's leadership responsibilities include developing and implementing institutional plans, staffing the organization, locating and allocating resources and financial support, and directing the institution toward attaining its goals and objectives as set forth in its mission.

Administrators share responsibility for ensuring that institutional plans and activities are carried out and, therefore, should be qualified to provide effective leadership and efficient management consonant with the institution's goals, objectives, size, and complexity. Administrators should have the skills, time, assistance, technology, and information systems necessary to enable them to discharge their duties effectively. Consistent with the institution's mission, administration selection processes should give appropriate consideration to diversity in areas such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender. The administrative staff should work effectively as a team and work cooperatively with other constituencies of the institution.

Assignments of multiple functions to one individual or the assignment of administrative work (with or without compensation) to faculty members may be appropriate, but such practices should be reviewed periodically. Systematic procedures for evaluating administrative units and opportunities for the professional renewal of personnel should be established.

Administrators need close enough contact with current operations and faculty thinking to be effective in assisting the faculty and advancing the institution's goals and objectives. Administrators also need contact with students sufficient to understand their concerns and perspectives.

Fundamental Elements of Administration

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ a chief executive whose primary responsibility is to lead the institution toward the achievement of its goals and with responsibility for administration of the institution;
- ❑ a chief executive with the combination of academic background, professional training, and/or other qualities appropriate to the institution's mission;
- ❑ administrative leaders with appropriate skills, degrees and training to carry out their responsibilities and functions;
- ❑ qualified staffing appropriate to the goals, type, size, and complexity of the institution;
- ❑ adequate information and decision-making systems to support the work of administrative leaders;
- ❑ clear documentation of the lines of organization and authority; and
- ❑ periodic assessment of the effectiveness of administrative structures and services.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of written public statements to faculty, students and other constituencies on the chief executive's vision for the institution
- ❑ review of the sufficiency and effectiveness of directors, supervisors and administrators to carry out the functions of the institution
- ❑ review of the adequacy of clerical, technological, and other support for administrative personnel
- ❑ a review of the organizational structure and charts clearly indicating reporting/responsibility relationships to ensure that it is appropriately structured, and analysis of the structure's efficiency and effectiveness

Standard 6

Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support to academic and intellectual freedom.

Context

Integrity is a central, indispensable and defining hallmark of effective higher education institutions. An institution demonstrates integrity through the manner in which it specifies its goals, selects and retains its faculty, admits students, establishes curricula, determines programs of research, pursues its fields of service, demonstrates sensitivity to equity and diversity issues, advocates its resources, serves the public interest, and provides for the success of its students. Political interference in the affairs of an educational institution may threaten its freedom and effectiveness.

In all its activities, whether internal or external, an institution should keep its promises, honor its contracts and commitments, and represent itself truthfully. The same adherence to ethical standards and conduct should extend equally to all members of the institution, whether they are part of the institution through distance learning programs, subsidiaries, or other arrangements. Institutions should adhere to such integrity in all institutional settings, venues, and activities.

Academic freedom, intellectual freedom and freedom of expression are central to the academic enterprise. These special privileges, characteristic of the academic environment, should be extended to all members of the institution's community (*i.e.* full-time faculty, adjunct, visiting or part time faculty, staff, students instructed on the campus, and those students associated with the institution via distance learning programs).

Academic and intellectual freedom gives one the right and obligation as a scholar to examine data and to question assumptions. It also obliges instructors to present all information objectively because it asserts the student's right to know all pertinent facts and information. A particular point of view may be advanced, based upon complete access to the facts or opinions that underlie the argument, as long as the right to further inquiry and consideration remains unabridged. To restrict the availability or to limit unreasonably the presentation of data or opinions is to deny academic freedom. The effective institution addresses diversity of opinion with openness and balance.

Intellectual freedom does not rule out commitment; rather it makes it possible. Freedom does not require neutrality on the part of individuals or educational institutions, or toward the value systems that may guide them. Institutions may hold particular political, social, or religious philosophies, as may individual faculty members or students; but both individuals and institutions should remain intellectually free and allow others the same freedom to pursue truth.

Educational institutions should exemplify within their own working environment those qualities that they endeavor to impart to their students. These include justice, equity, and respect for diversity and human dignity. Institutions whose charters and policies require adherence to specific beliefs or codes of conduct for faculty, staff, or students should provide prior notice of these requirements. The institution should state clearly the conditions of employment or study.

The basis of accreditation is self-reporting and peer-review. It is, therefore, essential that the relationship between the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and member institutions is one of trust and confidence. All changes and issues affecting institutional mission, goals, sites, programs and other material changes should be disclosed accurately and in a timely fashion to the accrediting association. Conversely, the accrediting association does not dictate the mission and goals of member institutions.

There will be times when issues of privacy require strict confidentiality. However, when possible and appropriate, the effective institution makes public factual information to those individuals and groups, including the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which would have a legitimate interest in the operations and achievements of the institution.

Fundamental Elements of Integrity

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ fair and impartial processes, published and widely available, to address student grievances, such as alleged violations of institutional policies. The institution assures that student grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably;
- ❑ fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of employees;
- ❑ sound ethical practices and respect for individuals through its teaching, scholarship/research, service, and administrative practice, including the avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all its activities and among all its constituents;
- ❑ equitable and appropriately consistent treatment of constituencies, as evident in such areas as student discipline, student evaluation, grievance procedures, faculty promotion, tenure, retention and compensation, administrative review, curricular improvement, and institutional governance and management;
- ❑ a climate of academic inquiry and engagement supported by widely disseminated policies regarding academic and intellectual freedom;

- ❑ an institutional commitment to principles of protecting intellectual property rights;
- ❑ a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives;
- ❑ honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, and recruiting and admissions materials;
- ❑ reasonable, continuing student access to paper or electronic catalogs;
- ❑ when catalogs are available only electronically, the institution's web page provides a guide or index to catalog information for each catalog available electronically;
- ❑ when catalogs are available only electronically, the institution archives copies of the catalogs as sections or policies are updated;
- ❑ availability of factual information about the institution, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education annual data reporting, the self-study or periodic review report, the team report, and the Commission's action, accurately reported and made publicly available to the institution's community;
- ❑ institutional information provided in a manner that ensures student and public access, such as print, electronic, or video presentation;
- ❑ fulfillment of all applicable standards and reporting and other requirements of the Commission; and
- ❑ periodic assessment of the integrity evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the manner in which these are implemented.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ review of policies governing news releases and public announcements describing the institution or explaining its position on various issues
- ❑ analysis of the application of institutional policies governing conflict of interest
- ❑ review of promotion and tenure statistics
- ❑ review of student grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures, as well as resulting actions or outcomes
- ❑ evidence that faculty and staff handbooks describe promotion, compensation, tenure, and grievance procedures, and an analysis of outcomes of these activities

Standard 7

Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in: achieving its mission and goals; implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes; using institutional resources efficiently; providing leadership and governance; providing administrative structures and services; demonstrating institutional integrity; and assuring that institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its students and graduates.

Context

The Commission on Higher Education expects institutions to assess their overall effectiveness, with primary attention given to the assessment of student learning outcomes, which are fundamental to the accreditation process. This standard on institutional assessment has a clear relationship to and builds upon the six previous accreditation standards, each of which includes periodic assessment of effectiveness as one of its fundamental elements. Information obtained through assessment should be used as a basis for assessing the institution's effectiveness in achieving its stated goals. In addition, outcomes assessment should be linked to an institution's ongoing planning and resource allocation processes. Consequently, evidence gathered about students' development and learning outcomes can be used to make judgments about resource allocation in planning for overall institutional effectiveness and to enhance academic programs. Institutional effectiveness is also assessed to monitor and improve the environment provided for teaching and learning and for enhancing overall student success. Assessment of student learning is addressed more particularly under Standard 14.

While the Commission expects institutions to engage in outcomes assessment, it does not prescribe a specific approach or methodology. The approach and methodology to be employed are institutional prerogatives and may vary, based on the stated mission, goals, objectives and resources of the institution. Nevertheless, an institution engaged in self-study or periodic review should provide evidence that the assessment of outcomes, particularly learning outcomes, is an ongoing institutional activity.

Outcomes assessment is not an end; it should be a means by which an institution utilizes data to improve teaching and learning and for overall institutional improvement. Therefore, it is essential that faculty, administrative staff and others be involved in the assessment process.

The Commission has long challenged its member institutions to pursue excellence, and it understands that the purpose of outcomes assessment is twofold: accountability and improvement. External forces and internal priorities require institutions of higher education to demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency to students and to the broader public as well. The improvement of overall educational quality and the enhancement of effective teaching and learning will occur when faculty and administrators work together to implement a sound, institution-wide program of outcomes assessment.

Fundamental Elements of Institutional Assessment

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ a written assessment plan and process that meet the following criteria:
  - ◆ a foundation in the institution's mission, goals, and objectives
  - ◆ periodic assessment of institutional effectiveness that addresses the total range of educational offerings, services, and processes, including planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes; institutional resources; leadership and governance; administration; institutional integrity; and student learning outcomes
  - ◆ support and collaboration of faculty and administration
  - ◆ systematic and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures, which maximize the use of existing data and information
  - ◆ evaluative approaches that yield results that are useful in institutional planning, resource allocation, and renewal
  - ◆ realistic goals and a timetable, supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources
  - ◆ periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution's assessment plan;
- ❑ use of assessment results to improve and gain efficiencies in administrative services and processes, including activities specific to the institution's mission (e.g. service, outreach, research); and
- ❑ a written institutional (strategic) plan that reflects consideration of data from assessment.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ review of all components of the assessment plan and an analysis of representative data/findings
- ❑ evidence of institution-wide assessment efforts (e.g. committee minutes or reports)
- ❑ analysis of how the assessment infrastructure supports the evaluation process
- ❑ review of reports or other evidence of student involvement in and satisfaction with academic support programs and co-curricular activities
- ❑ analysis of student satisfaction survey results
- ❑ analysis of teaching effectiveness evaluations, including identification of good practices
- ❑ assessments of student advising and service programs, with recommendations for improvements and evidence of action based on recommendations
- ❑ assessments of campus climate by faculty and staff, with recommendations for improvements
- ❑ assessment of faculty and staff development programs
- ❑ evidence of continuous improvement, as evidenced in administrative policies and procedures
- ❑ review of evaluations of special, mission driven programs or projects, with recommendations for improvement, and evidence of action based on recommendations

Educational Effectiveness

Standard 8

Student Admissions

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission.

Context

The student is the primary beneficiary of an institution's educational mission, and the success of an institution or program is best measured by the success of its students during and after their enrollment in an institution's programs. Every institution's admissions practices should ensure that students have a reasonable opportunity for success in meeting their educational goals, including transfer, graduate, part-time, adult, and non-degree students, and all others matriculating at the institution.

The criteria used to assess the congruence among recruitment, admission, retention and academic success may vary depending on institutional goals and structure and on student needs and educational objectives. For all institutions, however, admissions criteria and practices are important elements in promoting student retention and success. Analysis of student persistence and attrition data should inform the periodic review of admissions criteria and policies.

Fundamental Elements of Student Admissions

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ admissions policies, developed and implemented, that support and reflect the mission of the institution;
- ❑ admissions policies and criteria available to assist the prospective student in making informed decisions;
- ❑ accurate and comprehensive information regarding academic programs, including any required placement or diagnostic testing;

- ❑ information on student learning outcomes available to prospective students;
- ❑ accurate and comprehensive information, and advice where appropriate, regarding financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and refunds;
- ❑ published and implemented policies and procedures regarding transfer credit and credit for extra-institutional college level learning; and
- ❑ ongoing assessment of student success, including but not necessarily limited to retention, that evaluates the match between the attributes of admitted students and the institution's mission and programs.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of the periodic review of admissions catalogs, viewbooks, web sites, recruiting and other relevant materials for accuracy and effectiveness
- ❑ review of procedures that guide the admissions program and policies or guidelines regarding the type of information the institution makes known to potential students and the general public
- ❑ evidence of periodic review of the accuracy and effectiveness of financial aid information, scholarship material, and academic advising materials
- ❑ evidence of the utilization of information appropriate to the review of financial aid practices, to reflect whether practices adequately support admission and retention efforts
- ❑ evidence of the utilization of information appropriate to the review of student retention, persistence, and attrition, to reflect whether these are consistent with student and institutional expectations
- ❑ evidence of the utilization of attrition data to ascertain characteristics of students who withdraw prior to attaining their educational objectives and, as appropriate, implementation of strategies to improve retention through changes in admissions criteria or procedures

Standard 9

Student Support Services

The institution providestudentsupport services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Context

The support of students toward their educational goals usually requires a well-organized and appropriate program of student services, complemented by good staff leadership and broad-based institutional commitment. Within the scope of the institutional mission, student services can reinforce and extend the college's influence beyond the classroom. These services promote the comprehensive development of the student, and they become an integral part of the educational process, helping to strengthen learning outcomes. Appropriate and comparable student services should support all student learning in the context of the institution's mission and chosen educational delivery system. Similarly, the institution should clearly convey to students their roles and responsibilities as partners in the educational process. The quality of campus life often contributes significantly to student learning; therefore, institutions, and particularly those with residential populations, should be attentive to a wide range of student life issues, including mental health and safety.

Framed by the institution's mission, services should be responsive to the full spectrum of diverse student needs, abilities, and cultures. Dependent upon institutional mission, support services may include but are not limited to admissions, financial aid, registration, orientation, advising, counseling, tutoring, discipline, health, housing, placement, student organization and activities, cultural programming, child care, security, and athletic activities.

Delivery of student support services should be flexible in nature and should vary depending on the modes and levels of educational delivery. Consistent with institutional mission, programs should be available to provide support to diverse student populations such as older students, students with disabilities, international students, distance and distributed learning students, and students at sites other than a main campus.

Recreational, intercollegiate, and intramural athletic programs should be consistent with, and actively supportive of, the institution's mission and goals and consistent with the academic success, physical and emotional well-being, and social development of those who participate.

Fundamental Elements of Student Support Services

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ a program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission, consistent with student learning expectations, and available regardless of place or method of delivery;
- ❑ qualified professionals to supervise and provide the student support services and programs;
- ❑ procedures to address the varied spectrum of student academic and other needs, in a manner that is equitable, supportive, and sensitive, through direct service or referral;
- ❑ appropriate student advisement procedures and processes;
- ❑ if offered, athletic programs that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles, norms, and procedures that govern other institutional programs;
- ❑ reasonable procedures, widely disseminated, for equitably addressing student complaints or grievances;
- ❑ records of student complaints or grievances;
- ❑ policies and procedures, developed and implemented, for safe and secure maintenance of student records ;
- ❑ published and implemented policies for the release of student information; and
- ❑ ongoing assessment of student support services and the utilization of assessment results for improvement.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ analysis of support services available to students, including any distinctions among physical sites or modes of delivery and the particular support services those sites/modes require (instructional technology support, library/learning resources support, etc.)
- ❑ evidence of a structure appropriate to the delivery of student support services (organizational chart)
- ❑ review of student handbooks, catalogs, newspapers, and schedules, including materials showing availability and explaining the nature of services (published in print and/or available electronically)
- ❑ evidence of student grievances and resolutions, and review of such records to determine whether there are noteworthy patterns

Standard 10

Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Context

Faculty are central to each institution's teaching and learning activities, and faculty bear primary responsibility for promoting, facilitating, assuring, and evaluating student learning. The faculty and other qualified professionals are responsible for devising and developing an institution's academic, professional, research, and service programs within the framework of its educational mission and goals. They are committed to all aspects of students' success.

Within some institutions, functions previously assumed to be a part of traditional faculty roles are now the responsibility of other qualified professionals. A professional is qualified by virtue of education, training, experience or appropriate skills. Designated professional qualifications should be consistent with the expected academic outcome, reflecting both appropriate standards of quality and the institutional mission. Whenever used in these standards, the term "faculty" shall be broadly construed to encompass qualified professionals such as third parties contracted by the institution, part-time faculty, adjuncts, and those assigned responsibilities in academic development and delivery. Such professionals may include, as well, those responsible for the institution's academic information resources.

There should be an adequate core of faculty and other qualified professionals that is responsible to the institution, supports the programs offered, and assures the continuity and coherence of the institution's programs. Faculty selection processes should give appropriate consideration to the value of faculty diversity, consistent with institutional mission, in areas such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Faculty participation in institutional planning, curriculum review, and other governance roles can be an appropriate recognition of their professional competence and commitment, where consistent with institutional governance structures. Such participation should complement the faculty's primary responsibilities for teaching and research.

Articulated and equitable procedures and criteria for periodic evaluation of all faculty contribute significantly to sustaining an appropriate level of growth and excellence. Such procedures and criteria for periodic evaluation support those

who, regardless of their professional titles, are responsible for the development and delivery of programs and services. Encouragement for faculty research, as well as for professional advancement and development, are characteristics of enlightened institutional policies.

For institutions relying on part-time, adjunct, temporary, and other faculty on time-limited contracts, employment policies and practices should be as carefully developed and communicated as those for full-time faculty. The greater the dependence on such employees, the greater is the institutional responsibility to provide orientation, oversight, evaluation, professional development, and opportunities for integration into the life of the institution.

The existence of collective bargaining agreements is an institutional matter or, as in the case of some public institutions, a matter of public policy. Although the Middle States Commission on Higher Education takes no position with respect to a decision to bargain collectively, all affected constituents should be attentive to the impact of bargaining on students and their needs, on professional relationships and responsibilities, and on educational effectiveness.

Fundamental Elements of Faculty

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ faculty and other professionals appropriately prepared and qualified for the positions they hold, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and sufficiently numerous to fulfill those roles appropriately;
- ❑ educational curricula designed, maintained, and updated by faculty and other professionals who are academically prepared and qualified;
- ❑ faculty and other professionals, including teaching assistants, who demonstrate excellence in teaching and other activities, and who demonstrate continued professional growth;
- ❑ demonstrated institutional support for the advancement and development of faculty;
- ❑ recognition of appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning, research, and service;
- ❑ published and implemented standards and procedures for all faculty and other professionals, for actions such as appointment, promotion, tenure, grievance, discipline and dismissal, based on principles of fairness with due regard for the rights of all persons;
- ❑ carefully articulated, equitable, and implemented procedures and criteria for review of all individuals who have responsibility for the educational program of the institution;
- ❑ criteria for the appointment, supervision, and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct, and other faculty consistent with those for full-time faculty; and
- ❑ adherence to principles of academic freedom, within the context of institutional mission.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of faculty productivity in the scholarship of teaching as well as in discipline-specific research and scholarship and in the creation of knowledge, consistent with the institution's mission
- ❑ analysis of the relationship between faculty characteristics and performance and student learning outcomes
- ❑ review of results of implemented appointment, promotion, and tenure standards and procedures
- ❑ evidence of dissemination of evaluation procedures and criteria
- ❑ analysis of student evaluations of teaching
- ❑ analysis of reports from faculty peer evaluations of teaching, scholarship and service
- ❑ analysis of institutional practices for the appointment, supervision, and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct, and other faculty on time-limited contracts
- ❑ analysis of the training, role, and effectiveness of graduate students who provide undergraduate instruction

Standard 11

Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Context

Teaching and learning are the primary purposes of any institution of higher education, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. The breadth and depth of student learning appropriate to the programs and levels of study and the demonstrable ability of students to integrate knowledge are key elements in judging the success of the educational programs of a college or university. While individual goals of undergraduate study may vary, most graduate study has as its immediate goal the achievement of an advanced degree—that of master or doctor—or a diploma, certificate, or recognized statement of earned credit through the formal, structured pursuit of learning beyond the level of the baccalaureate degree. Graduate studies should offer focused study and relevant independent research of a specialized nature, within the context of comprehensive institutional aims and with principled attention to related demands on institutional resources and implications for the institution's teaching climate. While the focus and intensity of the program may be different, this section of *Characteristics* applies equally to both undergraduate and graduate education.

The institution defines the degrees it offers both by identifying the expected student learning and by creating a coherent program of study (not simply a collection of courses) that leads to those desired outcomes. Curricular issues, generally falling within the responsibilities of the faculty, might address such elements as skill building and mastery of increasingly difficult subject matter along with general education and the learning expected in the specific field of study. Institutions should document the development and attainment of students relative to those intended outcomes. Policies and procedures by which degree requirements are established and student performance evaluated should be examined periodically.

Educational programs and curricula at institutions of higher education should exhibit sufficient content, rigor and depth to be characterized as collegiate or graduate level learning, as appropriate. To support its mission as an institution of higher education and the rigor of its academic programs, the institution clearly distinguishes between pre-college and college level study, and between undergraduate and graduate study. The design of specific courses, programs, and learning activities should be linked to clearly articulated goals of the specific programs of which they are part and to the overarching mission of the institution. Individual courses, programs, and sequences of study are dynamic and responsive to new research findings and modes of inquiry.

There should be coherence between an institution's curricular offerings and the other experiences that contribute to the total educational environment and promote the development of life skills. The mission of the institution and the characteristics of its students determine the appropriateness of co-curricular activities. Such activities could include out-of-class lectures and exhibitions, study abroad, civic involvement, independent learning and research, opportunities for informal student-faculty contact and other student activities.

These experiences might address the personal and social development of students in conjunction with and in support of their cognitive, academic, and intellectual development. Development might be fostered in areas such as personal aspirations, integrity and responsibility, self-awareness and self-reliance, awareness of values, interpersonal relationships, and leadership. There may be opportunities to integrate community services with educational programs, enhancing the effectiveness with which an institution fulfills both its educational mission and its responsibility to society.

Information literacy is an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, evaluating and using information. It includes determining the nature and extent of needed information; accessing information effectively and efficiently; evaluating critically information and its sources; incorporating selected information in the learner's knowledge base and value system; using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; understanding the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and information technology; and observing laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the access and use of information. Information literacy is vital to all disciplines and to effective teaching and learning in any institution. Institutions of higher education need to provide students and instructors with the knowledge, skills, and tools to obtain information in many formats and media in order to identify, retrieve, and apply relevant and valid knowledge and information resources to their study, teaching, or research.

Higher education has available a variety of new information resources and an evolving array of information technology and access structures, including computers, software applications and databases, that supplement its print-based knowledge resources and present new complexities for teachers and learners. How to develop and utilize knowledge and skills and discipline-specific investigative methods to identify, access, retrieve, and apply relevant content is a challenge for the future of learning and teaching in our universities, colleges and schools. Because the rate of technological change is rapid, affecting the ability to

access and to utilize information and knowledge, periodic updating or retraining is necessary.

The availability and accessibility of adequate learning resources, such as library services and the support of professional staff qualified by education, training and experience, are essential to an institution of higher education. The skills and knowledge of such professionals are important not only in their support of information literacy , but also in the development and implementation of other relevant academic activities. Academic quality, student learning, teaching performance, and institutional effectiveness are enhanced by programs that assist students, faculty and instructional staff to use information resources in a variety of media and formats, appropriate to the institution, and to understand how to apply the information acquired in their work effectively and ethically.

Recognition of college-level learning from other institutions may facilitate a student's progress without compromising an institution's integrity or the quality of its degrees. An institution's policies and procedures should provide appropriate consideration, consistent with good educational practice, for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. In its articulation and transfer policies, the institution should judge courses, programs, and other learning experiences on their learning outcomes and the existence of valid evaluation measures, including third-party expert review, and not on modes of delivery.

Increasingly, higher education institutions are serving adult learners, a population whose learning needs are different from those of traditional full-time or residential students. Institutions with a focus on adult learning need to demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity by developing institutional policies and practices that are appropriate to and supportive of adult learners.

Fundamental Elements of Educational Offerings

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution, *whatever its mission,* is characterized by the elements listed below. *These elements also apply to all other educational activities addressed within Standard 13.*

- ❑ educational offerings congruent with its mission, which include appropriate areas of academic study of sufficient content, breadth and length, and conducted at levels of rigor appropriate to the programs or degrees offered;
- ❑ formal undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs—leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential—designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning;

- ❑ program goals that are stated in terms of student learning outcomes;
- ❑ periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of any curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular experiences it provides its students and utilization of evaluation results as a basis for improving its student development program and for enabling students to understand their own educational progress;
- ❑ learning resources, facilities, instructional equipment, library services, and professional library staff adequate to support the institution's educational programs;
- ❑ collaboration between professional library staff and faculty in teaching and fostering information literacy skills relevant to the curriculum;
- ❑ programs that promote student use of information and learning resources;
- ❑ provision of comparable quality of teaching/instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness of its courses and programs regardless of the location or delivery mode;
- ❑ published and implemented policies and procedures regarding transfer credit. The acceptance or denial of transfer credit will not be determined exclusively on the basis of the accreditation of the sending institution or the mode of delivery but, rather, will consider course equivalencies, including expected learning outcomes, with those of the receiving institution's curricula and standards. Such criteria will be fair, consistently applied, and publicly communicated;
- ❑ policies and procedures to assure that the educational expectations, rigor, and student learning within any accelerated programs are comparable to those that characterize more traditional program formats;
- ❑ consistent with the institution's educational programs and student cohorts, practices and policies that reflect the needs of adult learners;
- ❑ course syllabi that incorporate expected learning outcomes; and
- ❑ assessment of student learning and program outcomes relative to the goals and objectives of the undergraduate programs and the use of the results to improve student learning and program effectiveness (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

Additional Elements for Graduate and Professional Education

- ❑ graduate curricula providing for the development of research and independent thinking which studies at the advanced level presuppose;
- ❑ faculty with credentials appropriate to the graduate curricula; and
- ❑ assessment of student learning and program outcomes relative to the goals and objectives of the graduate programs (including professional and clinical skills, professional examinations and professional placement where applicable) and the use of the results to improve student learning and program effectiveness (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of completed analytical reviews (of educational offerings) that address topics such as:
  - ◆ appropriateness to institutional mission
  - ◆ relevance to student goals, interests and aspirations
  - ◆ clarity of educational goals and related strategies for assessing student achievement of those goals
  - ◆ provision of adequate time on task and information to learn and to practice the knowledge, skills and abilities imparted by each program
  - ◆ provision of adequate balance between theory and practice, given programmatic and institutional goals
  - ◆ opportunity to integrate instructional and non-instructional experiences
  - ◆ opportunity for active student engagement in the learning undertaken
  - ◆ opportunity to practice and improve upon skills associated with the field or area studied
  - ◆ opportunity for collaborative learning and to work with others in the completion of learning tasks
  - ◆ provision of an atmosphere of inquiry where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued
- ❑ review of results from the institution's implemented outcomes assessment plan
- ❑ evidence of local and remote information resources, access structures, and technologies adequate to support the curriculum

- ❑ evidence of information literacy incorporated in the curriculum with syllabi, or other material appropriate to the mode of teaching and learning, describing expectations for students' demonstration of information literacy skills
- ❑ evidence of accessible reference tools to ascertain where relevant materials exist and are located
- ❑ assessment of information literacy outcomes, including assessment of related learner abilities
- ❑ evidence of trained instructional and reference staff, or other support services, available on-site or via remote access, to help students and teaching staff locate and evaluate information tools and resources
- ❑ evidence of an adequate policy and process, tailored to the mission and goals of the institution, for the development and management of information resources
- ❑ analysis of transfer trends and patterns, both to and from the institution
- ❑ review of articulation agreements and analysis of their impact and effectiveness
- ❑ review of the impact of transfer agreements or transfer acceptance mandates on the coherence and integrity of the institution's degree programs

Additional Optional Analysis and Evidence for Graduate and Professional Education

- ❑ evidence of graduate and professional program goals and objectives that are well-defined, coherent, reflective of institutional mission, and consistent with the profession for which the program prepares students
- ❑ review of the impact of graduate and professional programs on the overall resources of the institution
- ❑ evidence of defined roles and responsibilities for graduate students, especially those who serve as undergraduate instructors and laboratory assistants
- ❑ assessment of the training, role, and effectiveness of graduate students who provide undergraduate instruction

Standard 12

General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

Context

General education is an important component of all undergraduate and some graduate higher education degree programs. Institutions should identify and provide a recognizable core of general education that expresses the educational philosophy of the institution for each undergraduate degree program or cluster of degree programs. Consistent with institutional practices, general education degree requirements may be fulfilled through courses completed at the institution, transfer credits, competencies demonstrated in ways determined by the institution, or admission prerequisites.

A general education program—developed, owned, and reviewed by the institution's faculty—should be purposeful, coherent, engaging, and rigorous. General education skills may be taught or developed as part of courses in the major, in separate courses, or through a decentralized distribution. However, the skills and knowledge derived from general education and the major should be integrated because general education and study in depth, together, comprise a quality undergraduate education.

Institutions offering the associate and baccalaureate degrees will strike an appropriate balance between specialized and more general knowledge. The institution's ability to demonstrate that its students are able to integrate and apply in different contexts the core knowledge and skills learned in their coursework is a critical component of successful undergraduate educational programs.

General education incorporates essential knowledge, cognitive abilities, and an understanding of values and ethics, and it enhances students' intellectual growth. General education programs draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and sensitivity, and preparing them to make enlightened judgments outside as well as within their academic specialty. Information literacy—the understanding and set of skills necessary to carry out the functions of effective information access, evaluation, and application—is an essential component of any general education program and is promoted by the participation of professional library staff.

General education offerings should reflect the particular programs and mission of the institution. However, general education courses should not focus narrowly on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The content of general education within specialized degree programs should be comparable, though not necessarily identical, to traditional academic offerings at the collegiate level or above. Programs in postsecondary vocational technical institutions should evidence recognition of the relationship between broad education and the acquisition of techniques and skills. In professional degree programs beyond the baccalaureate, courses in ethics, humanities, and public policy may be particularly relevant.

Fundamental Elements of General Education

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ a program of general education of sufficient scope to enhance students' intellectual growth, and equivalent to at least 15 semester hours for associate degree programs and 30 semester hours for baccalaureate programs; (An institution also may demonstrate how an alternative approach fulfills the intent of this fundamental element.)
- ❑ a program of general education where the skills and abilities developed in general education are applied in the major or study in depth;
- ❑ consistent with institutional mission, a program of general education that incorporates study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives
- ❑ general education requirements assuring that, upon degree completion, students are proficient in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, technological capabilities appropriate to the discipline, and information literacy, which includes critical analysis and reasoning;
- ❑ general education requirements clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution; and
- ❑ assessment of general education outcomes within the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and evidence that such assessment results are utilized for curricular improvement.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of institutional statements of the rationale supporting the curriculum and the benefits of a quality general education program; and evidence that this rationale has been communicated to students, parents, advisors, employers, and other constituencies
- ❑ analysis of statements of institutional mission, goals, or objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education)
- ❑ analysis of statements of individual curricular or degree program goals/objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education)
- ❑ evidence of institutional support for the general education program (administrative structure, budget, faculty incentives)
- ❑ evidence of curriculum review processes that include general education components

Standard 13

Related Educational Activities

Institutional programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Context

The integrity and credibility of an institution's educational program rest directly on its acceptance of responsibility for all activities conducted in its name or under its sponsorship. Consistent with their missions, many institutions offer programs and activities that are defined by their particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship. These offerings could include basic skills, certificate programs, evaluated experiential learning, non-credit offerings, branch campuses/additional locations/other instructional sites, distance or distributed learning, and contractual relationships/affiliated providers, among others.

Some of these programs/activities are described below with brief narrative statements, followed by the identification of one or more Fundamental Elements and optional analysis and evidence. If an institution offers any of these educational activities, the institution is expected to meet this standard (13) and the related Fundamental Elements, as well as the relevant Fundamental Elements for Standard 11.

Basic Skills

Underprepared students may benefit from basic skills or developmental courses provided by an institution as part of its educational offerings. When offered, such pre-college level courses, taken prior to or concurrent with enrollment in degree credit courses, can prepare the student for success in achieving his or her educational goals.

Fundamental Elements

- ❑ systematic procedures for identifying students who are not fully prepared for college level study;

- ❑ provision of or referral to relevant courses and support services for admitted underprepared students; and
- ❑ remedial or pre-collegiate level courses that do not carry academic degree credit.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ review of the effectiveness of tests or measures used to place students in developmental courses
- ❑ analysis of the impact of developmental program completion on student persistence and academic achievement in degree programs and courses
- ❑ assessment of the effectiveness of support services for underprepared students

Certificate Programs

Certificate programs are non-degree credentials at the pre-baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, post-masters, or post-doctoral level, granted upon completion of a coherent, sequential program of study, usually for credit. Such programs and the courses included within them should follow the institution's usual development, approval, review, and assessment processes; should include articulated expected student knowledge, skills, and competency levels; and should comply with industry, national, or other definitions of such credentials, where appropriate.

Fundamental Element

- ❑ certificate programs that have clearly articulated expectations of student learning and that are designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ evidence of certificate program goals and objectives, reflecting and consistent with institutional mission
- ❑ evidence of articulated student knowledge, skills, and competency levels
- ❑ when national definitions of such credentials exist, evidence that the outcomes of certificate programs are consistent with these
- ❑ evidence of published program objectives, requirements, and curricular sequence

- ❑ evidence of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the design, delivery, and ongoing evaluation of certificate programs
- ❑ review of stated rationale, where processes for program oversight and quality assurance are different or separate from the institution's regular processes
- ❑ analysis of availability and effectiveness of appropriate student support services
- ❑ if courses completed within a certificate program are applicable to a degree program offered by the institution, evidence of academic oversight to assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses
- ❑ analysis of the impact of certificate programs on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning generally refers to knowledge or skills obtained outside of a higher education institution. Recognition of college-level experiential learning, which is derived from work, structured internships, or other life experience, may facilitate a student's progress without compromising an institution's integrity or the quality of its degrees. An institution's policies and procedures should provide appropriate consideration, consistent with good educational practice, for the individual student who has gained college level learning from other sources. However, procedures to assess learning for the award of academic credit (especially where such credit is part of an accelerated degree program) should define college-level learning and state clearly that credit is awarded for demonstrated learning, and not merely for experience.

Fundamental Elements

- ❑ credit awarded for experiential learning that is supported by evidence in the form of an evaluation of the level, quality and quantity of that learning;
- ❑ published and implemented policies and procedures defining the methods by which prior learning can be evaluated and the level and amount of credit available by evaluation;
- ❑ published and implemented policies and procedures regarding the award of credit for prior learning that define the acceptance of such credit based on the institution's curricula and standards;
- ❑ published and implemented procedures regarding the recording of evaluated prior learning by the awarding institution;

- ❑ credit awarded appropriate to the subject and the degree context into which it is accepted; and
- ❑ evaluators of experiential learning who are knowledgeable about the subject matter and about the institution's criteria for the granting of college credit.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ analysis of the amount and type of evaluated learning credit awarded by discipline
- ❑ analysis of the reports prepared by evaluators including the methods of assessing the learning and the information or competencies considered
- ❑ review of standards utilized by evaluators in assessing college level learning
- ❑ analysis of student portfolios or other means used to demonstrate college level learning
- ❑ analysis of consistency in the award of college credit for experiential learning across the institution
- ❑ analysis of consistency in the award of college credit for experiential learning in particular disciplines
- ❑ evidence of training and development of those who evaluated experiential learning for college credit
- ❑ review of the acceptance in transfer of the awarding institution's evaluated experiential learning credit

Non-credit Offerings

Non-credit offerings may be offered on-site and through distance learning modalities. To the extent that these offerings are an important part of an institution's activities, they should be consistent with its mission and goals. Whether these offerings are internally or externally developed, appropriately qualified professionals with responsibility to the institution should have oversight for the design, delivery, and evaluation of such offerings. If non-credit courses are potentially applicable to for-credit programs at the institution, academic oversight should assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses.

Fundamental Element

- ❑ non-credit offerings that are designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ evidence of the rationale for non-credit offerings, including the demonstrated consistency of non-credit offerings with the institution's stated mission and goals
- ❑ evidence of articulated student knowledge, skills, and/or competency levels for non-credit offerings
- ❑ evidence of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the design, delivery, and evaluation of non-credit offerings
- ❑ review of assessment results for non-credit programs
- ❑ if non-credit courses may be applied to a degree program offered by the institution, evidence of academic oversight to assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses
- ❑ analysis of the impact of non-credit programs on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals

Branch Campuses, Additional Locations, and Other Instructional Sites

(Including Business/Corporate Locations and Study Abroad)

Educational offerings at branch campuses, additional locations, or other instructional sites—including study abroad locations and business/corporate locations—may extend learning opportunities to a variety of populations, some of which are not otherwise served by the institution. Programs so delivered should meet standards comparable to those of other institutional offerings.

Fundamental Element

- ❑ offerings at branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites (including study abroad locations and programs offered at business/corporate sites) that meet standards for quality of instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness comparable to those of other institutional offerings.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ review of detailed information on all sites/locations, including initial date of operation, programs offered, student profile, faculty profile, administrative profile, physical and technological resources
- ❑ analysis of the adequacy and appropriateness of library/information and other learning resources
- ❑ evidence that activities at other locations meet all appropriate standards, including those related to learning outcomes
- ❑ analysis of the adequacy and appropriateness of student support services
- ❑ analysis of the adequacy of other resources for these sites (e.g. technology)
- ❑ analysis of site specific outcomes assessment data and related conclusions about effectiveness and comparability to similar offerings elsewhere at the institution
- ❑ review of the participation of site faculty and other personnel in institution-wide processes of evaluation, planning, and governance
- ❑ analysis of the impact of branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals

Distance or Distributed Learning

Distance learning or distributed learning is a formal educational process in which some or all of the instruction occurs when the learner and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time; information or distributed learning technology is often the connector between the learner and the instructor or the site of origin. Programs delivered through distance learning modalities—whether by the internet, television, video-conferencing, or other means—should meet academic and learning support standards, appropriate to the type of delivery, comparable to those offered in more traditional formats within higher education. Student learning objectives and outcomes should be consistent across comparable offerings, regardless of where or how they are provided.

Fundamental Elements

- ❑ distance learning offerings (including those offered via accelerated or self-paced time formats) that meet institution-wide standards for quality of instruction, articulated expectations of student learning, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness. If the institution provides parallel on-site offerings, the same institution-wide standards should apply to both;

- ❑ consistency of the offerings via distance learning with the institution's mission and goals, and the rationale for the distance learning delivery;
- ❑ planning that includes consideration of applicable legal and regulatory requirements;
- ❑ demonstrated program coherence, including stated program learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded;
- ❑ demonstrated commitment to continuation of offerings for a period sufficient to enable admitted students to complete the degree or certificate in a publicized timeframe;
- ❑ assurance that arrangements with consortial partners or contractors do not compromise the integrity of the institution or of the educational offerings;
- ❑ validation by faculty of any course materials or technology-based resources developed outside the institution;
- ❑ available, accessible, and adequate learning resources (such as libraries or other information resources) appropriate to the offerings at a distance;
- ❑ an ongoing program of appropriate orientation, training, and support for faculty participating in electronically delivered offerings; and
- ❑ adequate technical and physical plant facilities , including appropriate staffing and technical assistance, to support electronic offerings.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ review of institutional support for faculty participation in the design, development, and delivery of academic offerings at a distance
- ❑ analysis of partnerships with other institutions to offer or accept offerings at a distance, to assure consistency with the institution's general policies regarding such partnerships or consortia and to assure the integrity of the degree-granting institution
- ❑ evidence that students have appropriate hardware and the technology skills and competencies needed to succeed in the distance learning environment of the institution.
- ❑ analysis of the appropriateness and effectiveness of student services available to students at a distance (admissions, financial aid, registration, advisement, counseling, tutoring, placement, etc.)

- ❑ review of published materials, including analysis of the extent to which there is a complete and accurate description of the instructional delivery systems utilized, learning formats, prerequisites for participation, expected learning, and completion and any other requirements
- ❑ analysis of the adequacy of the institution's technological infrastructure to support the resource needs of distance learning activities, and consideration of how learning outcomes determine the technology being used
- ❑ analysis of the adequacy of technological assistance and support to both student and faculty in distance learning
- ❑ evidence of how the institution assures that students and faculty have sufficient technological and information literacy skills to access and to use effectively the information resources available at a distance
- ❑ analysis of institutional processes to evaluate the appropriateness, efficiency, and effectiveness of its distance learning operations
- ❑ review of articulated expectations for and the effectiveness of interaction between faculty and students and among students
- ❑ analysis of the impact of distance learning on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals

Contractual Relationships and Affiliated Providers

As institutions seek to improve the ways in which they provide education to their students, institutions may find that it is more practical or efficient to enter into consortial arrangements or to contract with other institutions or organizations to provide certain aspects of the education experience, including faculty, recruitment of students, and course/program development. Because an accredited institution is responsible for all activities carried out in the institution's name, the Commission's accreditation standards, policies, and procedures—including those on outcomes assessment, advertising, and recruitment—are fully applicable to any contractual arrangements with another regionally accredited institution or with a non-regionally accredited organization. Contractual relations with for-profit firms or other institutions require diligent care to protect an institution's integrity and to avoid abuse of its accredited status.

An affiliated provider may be a subsidiary, parent, "sister" or other entity (for-profit or non-profit) legally related to the institution or unrelated (except through contractual arrangement) to the accredited institution. Depending on the specific relationship, such providers may or may not be included within the scope of the institution's accreditation. Relevant factors might include matters such as use of the same or similar names, ownership, incorporation, management, control of curriculum, finances, acceptance of credits, degree-granting authority, and extent of activities. However, whether or not the affiliate is included within the scope of the institution's accreditation , the nature

of the affiliation should be made clear both to the Commission and to the public, with particular attention to such issues as whether the provider offers its own programs or grants its own degrees; whether students are distinct from or considered to be students of the parent institution; what student learning and support services are available; and whether courses offered by the affiliated provider are applicable to a degree program offered by the accredited institution. Attention should be given to the impact of the affiliated entity on the institution's resources and the institution's ability to fulfill its mission and goals.

Fundamental Element

- ❑ contractual relationships with affiliated providers, other institutions, or organizations that protect the accredited institution's integrity and assure that the institution has appropriate oversight of and responsibility for all activities carried out in the institution's name or on its behalf.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- ❑ evidence of consistency (of the course or program offered via contractual arrangement) with the institution's mission and goals
- ❑ review of documentation of the expressed purposes, roles, and scope of operation for the affiliated entity, including whether the entity offers its own separate courses, programs, or degrees in its own name
- ❑ evidence of the extent to which the affiliated entity is separate from or part of the accredited institution, including relevant factors such as faculty, other personnel, processes, ownership, management, and governance
- ❑ evidence of published public information that clearly and accurately represents the contractual relationship between the institution and the other entity
- ❑ evidence that the accredited institution reviews and approves work performed by the contracted party in such functional areas as admissions criteria, appointment of faculty, content of courses/programs, instructional support resources (including library/information resources), evaluation of student work, and outcomes assessment
- ❑ evidence of provision of appropriate protection for enrolled students in the event a contract is terminated or renegotiated
- ❑ review of student profile, including whether students of the affiliated entity are considered to be students of the accredited institution or are eligible for financial aid
- ❑ analysis of the involvement of the institution's own faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the development and review of curriculum offered through the contractual arrangement

- ❑ analysis of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in validating the quality of course materials or resources (technology-based, etc.) developed by those external to the provider and the institution
- ❑ assessment of the effectiveness and appropriateness of student learning and support services provided by the affiliated entity and/or the primary institution
- ❑ if courses or programs offered as its own by the affiliated entity may be applied to a degree offered by the institution, evidence of academic oversight to assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses
- ❑ analysis of the impact of the contractual arrangement on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals

Standard 14

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment ofstudent learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

Context

Outcomes assessment involves gathering and evaluating quantitative and/or qualitative information that demonstrates congruence between the institution's mission, goals, and objectives and the actual outcomes of its educational activities. While not all of the impact of an institution on its students can be readily measured, the assessment of student learning is essential whatever the nature of the institution, its particular mission, the types of programs it offers, or the manner in which its educational programs are delivered and student learning facilitated.

The systematic assessment of student learning is essential to monitoring quality and providing the information that leads to improvement. Implemented effectively, the assessment of student learning will involve the shared commitment of students, administrators and academic professionals.
The assessment of student learning has the student as its primary focus of inquiry. It is related to the assessment of institutional effectiveness, which is important as a means to monitor and improve the environment provided for teaching and learning (see Standard 7: Institutional Assessment). Because the purpose for assessing student learning is to help students improve and to maintain academic quality, the assessment measures chosen should be those that provide the students, faculty, and others with information about student learning that is specific; address questions that faculty and the institution care about; and are useful for assessing and enhancing academic quality.

The mission of the institution provides focus and direction to its outcomes assessment plan, and the plan should show how the institution translates its mission into learning goals and objectives. In order to carry out meaningful assessment activities, institutions must articulate statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and individual course levels, although the level of specificity will be greater at the course level. Course syllabi or guidelines should include expected learning outcomes. Moreover, institutions can be flexible in their approach to defining student learning at these different levels, such as repeating goals (some general education goals, for example) across

programs or defining the goals at the institutional or program level as being a synthesis of the goals set at the program and course levels.

While the specific learning goals at each level (course, program, and institutional) need not be included in the assessment plan itself, statements of expected student learning must be available on campus to those planning or implementing assessment activities and to those evaluating the institution. These learning outcomes should be interrelated, and their continuity, coherence, and integration among the three levels should be evident.

Although an assessment plan addresses learning goals at various levels, the assessment plan does not require necessarily a parallel three-tiered approach to outcomes assessment. The institution should specify those assessment measures, methods, and analyses that will be used to validate stated expectations for student learning. In addition, while the assessment of learning first occurs on an individual student basis within a particular course, institutions may select the level or levels at which they report assessment data.

At the course level, for example, grades are an effective measure of student achievement, provided there is a demonstrable relationship between the objectives for student learning and the particular bases (such as assignments and examinations) upon which student achievement is evaluated. The assessment of learning outcomes at the program or institutional level is likely to be reflected in an aggregation or a synthesis of course-level assessments, including capstone courses, and may incorporate data from such additional measures as professional licensure examinations. It also may be based on a representative sampling of learning outcomes or of students across the institution.

In developing their assessment plans, institutions should begin, of course, with those assessment measures already in place, such as course and program completion rates, retention rates, graduation rates, and job placement rates, as well as pre- and post-testing, scores on standardized tests, performance on licensing exams, graduate school performance, and studies of alumni and former students. Institutions also should consider developing new datasets related to learning outcomes. In all instances, institutions should utilize multiple approaches, which may be qualitative and/or quantitative, to demonstrate that graduates have achieved stated learning outcomes.

Assessment is not an event but a process and should be an integral part of the life of the institution. It is the responsibility of the institution to decide what assessment tasks should be performed, in what sequence, within what time frame, and for what effect. Not everything needs to be assessed each year. For example, the assessment of major programs might be tied to program review cycles, and the assessment of general education might proceed in a sequential fashion, assessing different sets of general education outcomes each year. Such institution-wide planning should provide a broad framework within which student learning may be assessed in ways consonant with disciplinary and institutional expectations.

Finally, and most significantly, a commitment to assessment of student learning requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use. Assessment information, derived in a manner appropriate to the institution and to the desired academic

outcomes, should be available to those who develop and carry out strategies that will improve teaching and learning.

Fundamental Elements of Assessment of Student Learning

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by:

- ❑ articulated expectations of student learning at various levels (institution, degree/program, course) that are consonant with the institution's mission and with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;
- ❑ a plan that describes student learning assessment activities being undertaken by the institution, including the specific methods to be used to validate articulated student learning goals/objectives;
- ❑ evidence that student learning assessment information is used to improve teaching and learning; and
- ❑ documented use of student learning assessment information as part of institutional assessment.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ❑ evidence of assessment approaches that derives from the institution's mission and which might incorporate such outcomes as cumulative learning, analytical and information skills, specific competencies, knowledge and cognitive abilities, student attitude development and growth, life skills, student activity involvement, and physical skills and techniques
- ❑ analysis of assessment results including
  - ◆ where applicable, basic skills development programs
  - ◆ subject area knowledge
  - ◆ development of general education and lifelong learning skills
  - ◆ attitudes and values that relate to the mission of the institution and to the programs of study
- ❑ analysis of direct and indirect indicators of student achievement such as persistence and graduation rates, student satisfaction and other evidence of student goal attainment, licensure examination results, alumni satisfaction and achievement, including consideration of parity of outcomes across different student groups

- ❑ analysis of results from a variety of assessment strategies, including standardized tests, local comprehensive tests, course-embedded assessment, self-reported measures, and portfolio assessment
- ❑ analysis of course, department or school reports on classroom based assessment practices and their outcomes, including grading approaches and consistency
- ❑ evidence that assessment findings are used to:
  - ◆ assist students in the improvement of their learning
  - ◆ assist faculty in the improvement of curricula and instructional activities
  - ◆ assist in reviewing and revising academic programs and support services
  - ◆ assist in planning, conducting and supporting professional development activities
  - ◆ assist in planning and budgeting for the provision of academic programs and services

Middle States Publications

Various documents supplement the 2002 edition of *Characteristics of Excellence,* describing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and its accreditation processes and practices. Many of these materials are available on the Commission's website (www.msache.org) and may be downloaded in PDF or as MSWord documents. Others may be purchased with the publications order form on the website.

There are several types of Commission publications:

Manuals on Accreditation Protocols

- ❑ For institutions seeking candidacy for accreditation
- ❑ For institutions planning for and engaged in self-study processes
- ❑ For evaluators and chairs of visiting teams
- ❑ For institutions preparing and reviewers evaluating periodic review reports
- ❑ For institutions requesting collaborative evaluations by the Commission and specialized accrediting agencies

Guidelines for Institutional Improvement

- ❑ The assessment of overall institutional effectiveness and the assessment of student learning in particular
- ❑ Best practices for distance or distributed learning
- ❑ Best practices for outcomes assessment

Commission Policies and Procedures

- ❑ Current policy, procedural, and advisory statements, available individually in looseleaf form or compiled in a portfolio

Other Materials

- ❑ A directory of member and candidate institutions, searchable on the website
- ❑ The Commission's newsletter, archived on the website and searchable

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